

### **LISTING OF CLAIMS**

1. (previously presented) A method for automatically managing an auction for determining relative priority for a service in a system wherein priority is based on the relative value of related bids, comprising:

receiving bid management data from a first bidder for managing bidding by the first bidder in the auction, the auction having at least two or more positions of priority, the received bid management data including information for selecting one of the two or more positions of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction;

checking for if a second bidder holds the selected position of priority, and

checking for whether a first bid from the first bidder exceeds a second bid from the second bidder in the auction for determining continuing priority for providing an ongoing service for the first and second bidder, wherein the relative position of priority for providing the service for the first bidder is dependent on whether the value of the first bid exceeds the value of the second bid, and wherein the relative position of priority for providing the service for the second bidder is dependent on whether the value of the second bid exceeds the value of the first bid;

according to the bid management data received from the first bidder, automatically incrementing the first bid to a value exceeding the second bid if the first bid does not exceed the second bid, to thereby maintain the selected position of priority for providing the service for the first bidder;

checking for whether the first bid is higher than needed to maintain the selected position of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction, and

if the first bid is higher than needed to maintain the selected position of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction, automatically reducing the first bid to a minimum which allows the bidder to keep the selected position of priority.

2. (original) The method of claim 1, further comprising executing the steps of checking and incrementing a plurality of times.

3. (original) The method of claim 2, further comprising pausing for a fixed period of time between each series of steps of checking and incrementing.

4. (original) The method of claim 3, wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of hypertext links to web pages in search results in an on-line web page search engine.

5. (original) The method of claim 4, wherein the ranking of a first hypertext link to a first web page for the first bidder is higher than the ranking of a second hypertext link to a second web page for the second bidder if the first bid is higher than the second bid.

6. (original) The method of claim 5, comprising placing bids on a plurality of search terms which may be typed into the search engine by search engine users wherein different ranking is determined for each search term.

7. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein the ranking of the first hypertext link is higher than the second hypertext link if the first bid is higher than the second bid for each of the plurality of search terms.

8. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein the step of checking and incrementing is executed for a plurality of search engines for a plurality of search terms.

9. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of priority for golf course tee-off times on one or several golf courses.

10. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of priority for airline reservations on one or several airlines.

11. (previously presented) A system for automatically managing an auction for determining relative priority for a service in a system wherein priority is based on the relative value of related bids, comprising:

an input device for receiving bid management data from a first bidder for managing bidding by the first bidder in the auction, the auction having at least two or more positions of priority, the received bid management data including selected one of the two or more positions of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction;

a processor electrically connected to a network for checking for if a second bidder holds the selected position of priority, and for checking for whether a first bid from the first bidder exceeds a second bid from a second bidder in the auction for determining continuing priority on a server electrically connected to the network for providing an ongoing service for the first and second bidder, wherein the relative position of priority for providing the service for the first bidder is dependent on whether the value of the first bid

exceeds the value of the second bid, and wherein the relative position of priority for providing the service for the second bidder is dependent on whether the value of the second bid exceeds the value of the first bid, and for automatically incrementing the first bid according to the bid management data received from the first bidder to a value exceeding the second bid if the first bid does not exceed the second bid, to thereby maintain the selected position of priority for providing the service for the first bidder; and a database electrically connected to the processor for storing the first and second bids;

the processor further for checking for whether the first bid is higher than needed to maintain the selected position of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction,

the processor further for automatically reducing the first bid to a minimum which allows the bidder to keep the selected position of priority if the first bid is higher than needed to maintain the selected position of priority that the first bidder wishes to maintain in the auction.

12. (original) The system of claim 11, wherein the processor is further for checking and incrementing the first bid a plurality of times.

13. (original) The system of claim 12, wherein the processor is further for pausing for a fixed period of time between each checking and incrementing of the first bid.

14. (original) The system of claim 13, wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of hypertext links to web pages in search results in an on-line web page search engine stored on the server.

15. (original) The system of claim 14, wherein the server is further for ranking of a first hypertext link to a first web page for the first bidder higher than the ranking of a second hypertext link to a second web page for the second bidder if the first bid is higher than the second bid.

16. (original) The system of claim 15, wherein the processor is further for placing bids on a plurality of search terms which may be typed into the search engine by search engine users wherein different ranking is determined for each search term.

17. (original) The system of claim 16, wherein the server is further for setting the ranking of the first hypertext link higher than the second hypertext link in a search result if the first bid is higher than the second bid for each of the plurality of search terms.

18. (original) The system of claim 17, further comprising a plurality of servers electrically connected to the network.

19. (original) The system of claim 18, further comprising a plurality of search engines on the plurality of servers.

20. (original) The system of claim 19, wherein the processor is further for checking and incrementing a plurality of bids for the first bidder on the plurality of search engines.

21. (original) The system of claim 11 wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of priority for golf course tee-off times on one or several golf courses.

22. (original) The system of claim 11 wherein the service to bidders comprises providing ranking of priority for airline reservations on one or several airlines.

23. (withdrawn) A system for automatically managing an auction for determining relative priority for vendors for selling to a plurality of buyers based on the relative value of related bids, comprising:

an input device for receiving bid management data from a first vendor for managing bidding by the first vendor in the auction;

a processor electrically connected to a network for checking for whether a first bid from the first vendor is lower than a second bid from a second vendor in an auction for determining priority on a server electrically connected to the network for ranking selling priority for the first and second vendor, wherein the relative priority for selling by the first vendor is dependent on whether the value of the first bid is lower than the value of the second bid, and wherein the relative priority for selling by the second vendor is dependent on whether the value of the second bid is lower than the value of the first bid, and for automatically decrementing the first bid according to the bid management data received from the first vendor to a value lower than the second bid if the first bid is not lower than the second bid, thereby causing the relative priority for the first vendor to exceed the priority for second vendor; and

a database electrically connected to the processor for storing the first and second bids.

24. (cancelled)

25. (cancelled)

26. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising executing a plurality of times the step of automatically reducing the first bid to a minimum which allows the bidder to keep the selected position of priority if the first bid exceeds a value needed to maintain the selected position of priority.

27. (previously presented) The system of claim 11, wherein the processor is for further for automatically reducing the first bid a plurality of times to a minimum which allows the bidder to keep the selected position of priority if the first bid exceeds a value needed to maintain the selected position of priority.